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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#) [KN](#)
SUBJECT: PRM ADMISSIONS OFFICE DIRECTOR MEETINGS IN BANGKOK

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR SUSAN SUTTON, REASON 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) Summary. In a meeting with the Thai Ministry of Interior, visiting PRM Office of Admissions Director Terry Rusch stated U.S. interest in resettling North Korean refugees from Thailand, outlined USG plans for large-scale Burmese resettlement during the current fiscal year and pressed for a streamlined RTG procedure for issuance of exit permits for U.S. refugee family reunification cases. MOI said it would work on the family reunification issue. Rusch also visited two facilities that house North Korean refugees and provided information about the U.S. refugee program. End summary.

¶2. (C) During a December 4-8 visit to Bangkok, PRM Office of Admissions Director Terry Rusch met with DHS, UNHCR, CDC, IOM, and ROK Embassy officials to discuss refugee issues. She discussed current refugee processing with Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) staff and toured the OPE facility. She also met with the Thai Ministry of Interior and with North Korean refugees at two facilities.

Meeting with Ministry of Interior

¶3. (U) In a December 7 meeting with Ministry of Interior (MOI) Deputy Permanent Secretary Priraphol Tritasavit, Rusch described how large-scale U.S. refugee resettlement processing in Asia was now focused on Thailand. She expressed appreciation for RTG assistance on Burmese refugee processing and said that the USG hoped to resettle about 15,000 refugees from Thailand during the current fiscal year. She provided the current state of play on the material support issue. Rusch requested that the RTG create a streamlined and predictable mechanism for the issuance of exit permits for U.S. refugee family reunification cases (Visas 93 and P3 cases). She noted that the U.S. had a backlog of such cases that numbered about 50 persons. This number would only grow larger in the future as U.S. refugee processing of Burmese accelerated.

¶4. (C) Rusch stated that the U.S. wanted to process the small number of North Korean refugees in Thailand who indicated interest in U.S. resettlement. She said the USG hoped the RTG would allow processing of additional North Korean cases. The USG was committed to discreet handling of such cases though it could not control all the actors, such as NGOs, involved in the North Korea refugee issue. The USG believed that the estimates of large numbers (100,000 or more) of North Koreans in southern China poised to enter Thailand were exaggerated. Rusch said that it was important that North Korean refugees have accurate information about the U.S. refugee program. To this end, she said she had met with two groups of North Korean refugees in Bangkok.

¶5. (C) Priraphol noted the points about North Korean refugees but did not respond substantively. He said that the MOI was limited in what it could do on exit permits for family reunification cases. The Thai National Security Council set guidelines that MOI had to work within. While it was possible to get exit permits for special humanitarian cases in certain instances, the number of such cases would be limited. It was important, therefore, to put in place a formal mechanism for the handling of such cases. Priraphol recommended that lists of family reunification cases be presented to MOI in Bangkok. MOI would then work with provincial governors to set up meetings of the local Provincial Admissions Boards (PABs). The PABs would screen the cases, and if they were approved, this would open the way for exit permits and departures of the family reunification cases.

Meetings with North Korean Refugees

¶6. (C) Rusch visited the Thai immigration detention Center (IDC) on December 6 with the local head of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Tom Coughlin to observe conditions for North Korean refugees at the Immigration Detention Center (IDC). JRS is the only NGO with RTG permission to provide detainees at the IDC with medical assistance. JRS reported overcrowding almost three times IDC's normal capacity. With recent Thai police raids on the South Korean shelter for North Koreans, there are currently 207 North Koreans detained at the center, of which 25 have expressed interest in resettlement to the U.S. Although each room was at maximum capacity, it was observed that the North Koreans had access to toilet and shower facilities. In general the North Koreans appeared to be adequately cared for by JRS.

¶7. (C) Rusch met with the North Koreans at the IDC and at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) who are interested in U.S. resettlement to clarify misunderstandings about the U.S. refugee program. In both town-hall-like meetings, the refugees asked for absolute guarantees that they will be accepted into the USG program and repeatedly asked about the speed of USG processing. One woman at the IDC reported her understanding from various media articles that the USG is obligated to accept every North Korean refugee. Rusch stated that the USG is committed to assisting North Korean refugees but the Act does not guarantee acceptance into the program. Rusch then described the current state of USG processing of North Koreans in Thailand and reiterated the uncertainty re timing for receiving RTG permission to process additional cases.

¶8. (C) Comment. It was evident from meetings at the IDC and YWCA that there exist many misconceptions and misunderstandings regarding the U.S. resettlement program among the North Korean refugees. Some factors contributing to this include misinformation in the media and among NGOs and missionary groups with interests in moving North Koreans to the U.S. More information outreach regarding the U.S. refugee program is required to reduce North Korean misconceptions and assist them in making an informed decision regarding resettlement in the ROK or U.S.

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